

STANDARDIZING TEACHING ENGLISH VOWELS IN EMPOWERING STUDENTS' PRONUNCIATION

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Abstract

Tulisan ini bertujuan memberikan ide pada standarisasi pengajaran bunyi vokal bahasa Inggris dalam memberdayakan pengucapan mahasiswa saat ini. Pengajaran bahasa Inggris saat ini adalah sebagai produksi bahasa secara internasional. Produksi bahasa adalah proses menyampaikan makna atau pengalaman dalam bahasa lisan dan tulisan. Tulisan ini fokus pada produksi bahasa lisan. Kita butuh teori tentang produksi bahasa. Yakni fonetik dan fonologi. Fonetik adalah kajian bunyi dan wujud material berbentuk simbol. Fonologi adalah kajian bunyi dan wujud mental atau wujud makna yang menunjukkan bahasa. Dalam pengajarannya saat ini, bahasa Inggris telah terbagi dalam tiga lingkaran, yakni: (1) lingkaran *inner*-bahasa pertama atau bahasa ibu, (2) lingkaran *outer*-bahasa kedua, dan (3) lingkaran *expanding*-bahasa asing. Ketiganya haruslah distandarisasi untuk pengajaran berdasarkan alfabet fonetik internasional (IPA). dan pengucapan yang diterima (RP). Pada kajian ini memokuskan pada bunyi vokal bahasa Inggris. Terdapat empat karaktersitik dalam menggambarkan bunyi vokal bahasa Inggris, yakni: (1) penempatan lidah, (2) tinggi lidah, (3) pusaran bibir, dan (4) kualitas bunyi vokal. Produksi vokal haruslah tepat dan benar untuk menghasilkan bunyi vokal bahasa Inggris menjadi standard dan diterima. Terdapat juga persepsi tambahan untuk bunyi vokal yang perlu diklarifikasi, yaitu kemingkinan bunyi vokal dari huruf vokal. Ini akan memberikan pengajaran untuk memudahkan produksi vokal kepada pengguna asing khususnya untuk masyarakat Indonesia.

Keywords: English Vowels, and Teaching Students' Pronunciation

INTRODUCTION

Human language is characterized by languages to express experience. Some experts concept this language as a production of mind, experience and ideology. Let us use the term "speech" as the cover of language production. In the action of speaking, the speaker adopts for himself a particular speech role, and in so doing assigns to the listener a complementary role which he wish to adopt in his turn. Halliday states the most fundamental types of speech role, which lie behind all the more specific types that we may eventually be able to recognize are just two: (1) giving; (2) demanding.² These two types absolutely are done in the interaction of language production in speech production.

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²Halliday, M. A. K.. *An Introduction to functional Grammar, Second Edition* (London: Edward Arnold, 1994), p. 68

There are so many problems in speech production in English. Rina Sari has found that students' vowel pronunciation at grade VIII SPM Negeri 2 Ulu Pungkut Mandailing Natal has been 34%. It has been categorized low. The students have got difficulties on some vowels such in pronouncing short vowel they are [ɒ], [ə], [æ], [ɛ], [ʌ] long vowel [ɜ:], [ɔ:] diphthong [əʊ], [eə], [iə], [uə] and triphthong [eiə], [əʊə], [ɪə], [ɪuə], [oɪə]. The reason of students' difficulties in pronouncing vowel have been confusing to differ vowels, less of practice, less in practice about pronunciation in daily life, not habitual pronounced English words, unable pronouncing good words and can't use speak English well, never be serious in learning process, less reading book, tongue stiff, and didn't know much about vowel, so they have difficult about.³

Thus, speech production is now studied in the theory of phonetics and phobology. The two of them function to identify sound and the representation in symbols (phonetics), and to identify sound and the mental representation in meaning that constitute language. The process can be seen such the production in pronunciation. Especially in English, pronunciation characterizes someone master English or not in oral language or speech production. Teaching English today has been divided by three circles, they are (1) inner circle-mother tongue or first user of English, (2) outer circle-second user of English, and (ε) expanding circle-foreign user of English. Thus, teaching English needs to standardize the way it is to produce orally. The way to standardize this is by referring to International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and Received Pronunciation (RP).

LANGUAGE PRODUCTION

A baby cries because she is wet. A bee performs its "wobble dance" to inform others in the hive where nectar can be found. A cat scratches the door of the cupboard where the cat food is kept when she is hungry. A dog barks to be let out. A parakeet says, "Pretty Bird" as he views in the mirror. A child says "I hate the tofu, and I won't eat it".⁴

Above are expressions productions of some life things to inform or convey their meaning to another. The Question is, are they languages? Certainly, each example communicates a message to those who receive it. But, most of us distinguish that only last example truly exemplifies the use of language. What most distinguishes human language from these other

³Sari, R., Students' Vowel Pronunciation at Grade VIII SPM Negeri 2 Ulu Pungkut Mandailing, Unpublished Thesis, (Padangsidempuan: IAIN Padangsidempuan, 2016), p. 65.

⁴Gleason, J. B. & Ratner, N. B., *Psycholinguistics*, (United States of America: Harcourt Brace College Publisher, 2005), p. 4.

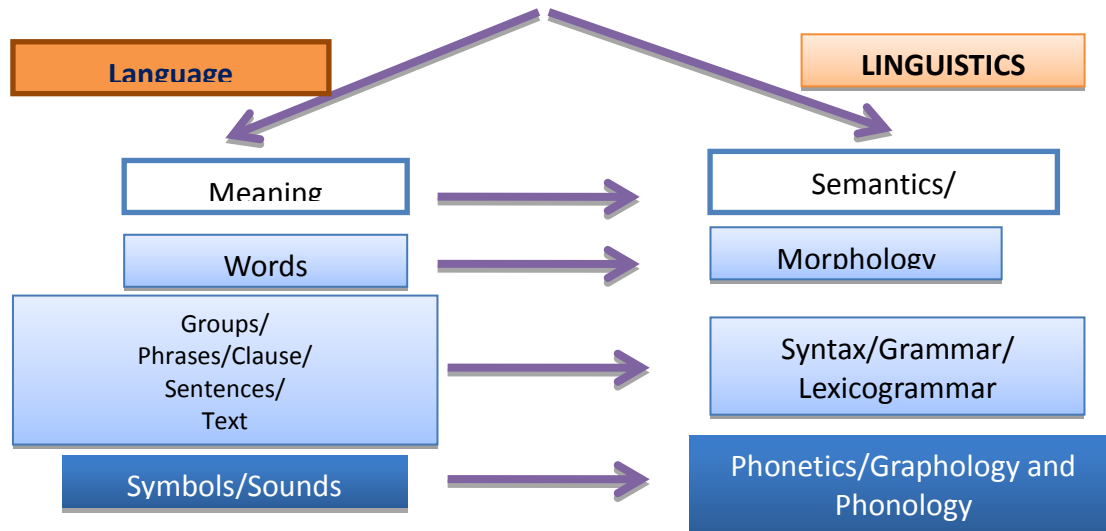
communicative acts? Gleason & Ratner say that human language is characterized by its hierarchical structure and all human languages express the full range of speaker's experiences even imaginary ones.⁵ This means, Language has consequence of what is said and to what with reference to the language production. Linguistic cognitivism around middle of 19th centuries until now such Chomsky, Halliday, Martin, Dudley-Evans, etc, concept this language as a production of mind, experience and ideology. Folks language and linguistic terminologies are describe such in Figure 1, that language is mind, experience, semiotics, production started from the meaning with reference to the social context as studied in semantics and pragmatics, which is realized by words, groups or phrases, clauses, sentences and text as studied in morphology, syntax or lexico-grammar, and finally which is realized by expressions in terms of symbol and sounds as studied in phonetics[graphology and phonology.

Further, a man or a woman cannot be alive lonely or in isolation. Saragih reveals that a man or a woman as representation of social phenomena means man or woman is born by interaction or production of two individuals (father and mother) and thus a man or a woman cannot be alive lonely or in isolation because his existence involves two individuals, so right from the beginning, a man or a woman has to interact with his father and mother.⁶ Then, a man or a woman has to be tailed in the social interaction to fulfil his need. No one can fulfil his need lonely. A man or a woman needs a tailor to create clothing, food seller to have food, physician or doctor to treat the disease (his[her heart is sick), etc. Thus, they must interact. Finally, only a man and woman are given an ability to tell his[her story or experiences to other (s). It thinks out an idea of history. In the other hand, animals (chicken, caw, and buffalo) have no this ability and of course have to be no ability to inform experience to other (s) because it is much danger to human being. If a chicken sees its mother or brothers is slaughtered by the owner for expression of gratitude to God or party and is able to tell the event to its friends or brothers, absolutely every chicken will not want to be taken care of by human being again. Ants and mosquitoes will together colonize human being.

⁵Gleason & Ratner, *Psycholinguistics*, p. 5.

⁶Saragih, A. *Bahasa dalam Konteks Sosial* (Medan: PPs Unimed 2006), p. 62.

**Figure 1: Folk Language and Linguistics Terminologies
 based on Linguistic Cognitivism View around 19th Centuries until now**



Let us use the term “speech” as the cover of language production. In the act of speaking, the speaker adopts for himself a particular speech role, and in so doing assigns to the listener a complementary role which he wish to adopt in his turn. Halliday states the most fundamental types of speech role, which lie behind all the more specific types that we may eventually be able to recognize are just two: (1) giving; (2) demanding.⁷ These two types absolutely are done in the interaction of language production in speech production. This concerns to study about of this speech production is studied in one of major studies of linguistics that is phonetics and phonology.

ENGLISH PHONETICS AND PHONOLOGY

Phonetics is physical manifestation of language in sound waves, how sounds are articulated and how sounds are perceived. Phonetics perceives Language as independent that study of all sounds. A variety of speech sounds can be produced in terms of another way of air stream change – Articulation. Articulation is done mainly somewhere at vocal tract. So, phonetics is the study of speech sounds; how they are produced in the vocal tract or production of speech sounds (articulatory phonetics), the study of the transmission and their physical properties (acoustic phonetics), and how they are perceived (auditory phonetics). Phonetics is concerned with the physical properties of speech sounds. It is subfield of linguistics which deals

⁷Halliday, *Op. Cit.*, p. 68,

with the description of speech sounds. The elements of phonetics is vowel, short vowel and long vowel, diphthong, triphthong, consonant, syllable, length, stress, tones, intonation, vocal tract articulation, place of articulation, and manner of articulation. Meanwhile, phonology goes on to discuss the phonemic of them in the next chapter of this discussion.

Part of our linguistics competence has to do with our knowledge of the sounds of our language. We know how to produce them though we may have never had to really think about the mechanics of doing so. Imagine, for instance that we are trying to describe to someone else how the first sound in the word *the* is pronounced (*the*, by the way, contains only two sounds). Or suppose we had to explain the differences between the vowels in the words *bat*, *beat*, and *boot*. We have probably been producing these sounds for years without having to think twice about them.⁸ Let see the elaboration of English standard in form of International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and Received Pronunciation (RP) below. International Phonetics Alphabet like many books have studied is as the reference of this discussion to decide the phonemes (symbols of sounds).

Figure 2: International Phonetic Alphabet

⁸Cipollone N., Keiser S. H. and Vasishth S., *Language Files*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press), p. 8.

PRONUNCIATION

Pronunciation is realized and categorized by phonetic realization after recording the sound production. Phonetic realization refers to the details of pronunciation of sound which may appear in the lexical set of two sounds, the two specific sound examples will be considered here: vowel and consonant sounds.⁹ This statement clarifies the category of pronunciation on only two categories: vowel and consonant sounds. It means that pronunciation will be identified by only transcribing the phonetic realization first from the sound production by speech organ. The explanation above shows that the two categories of pronunciation will be as the real identification on the students' pronunciation in English language production. The two categories, vowel and consonant sounds are element of phonetics transcription on sound production.

VOWEL

Vowels are sonorous, syllabic sounds are made with the vocal tract more open than it is for consonant and glide articulations.¹⁰ Vowels are sounds which are made without kind of closure to the escape of air through the mouth. They are sounds that are produced by movement of certain part of the tongue to a certain height but still not obstruction of the air stream. The quality of vowel depends upon the position of the tongue and lips. So the system that describes vowels does so in terms 4 characteristics:

1) Tongue Placement

If you repeat you repeat to yourself the vowel sounds *sit, sat, God* and *put* transcribed [i], [æ], [ɒ] and [u] you will find them as the following:

a) Sit [sit]

Vowel sound of [i], if it is seen on the mirror that the place of our tongue is held up or high to the front of the mouth

b) Sat [sæt]

Vowel sound of [æ], the tongue is front and low of the mouth

c) Gad [gɒd]

Vowel sound of [ɒ], the tongue is back and mid low of the mouth

d) Put [put]

⁹Bauer, L., *An Introduction to International Varieties of English*, (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 2002), p. 77.

¹⁰O'grady and Dobrovolsky, *Op. Cit.*, p. 2.

Vowel sound of [u], the tongue is back and mid high of the mouth

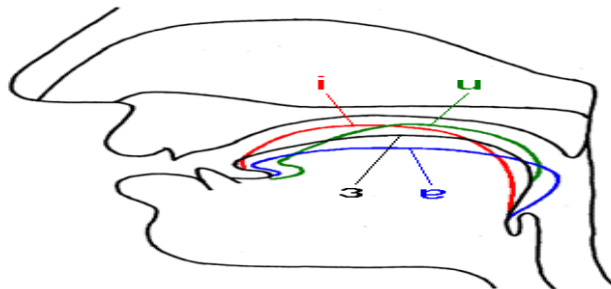
2) Tongue Height

As the example above, many books refer to say for classifying tongue height are open and close vowels. For the consistent of sound and in the continuity of perception in the next study, it is very important to decide right from the beginning. The characteristics of tongue height is divided into four, they are high, mid high, low and mid low vowels. High vowels are [i: and u], mid high vowels are [i, e, o and u]. Low vowels are [æ and a:], mid low vowels are [ɛ, ɒ and ɔ:]. Centre or central sounds are collaboration of tongue placement and height, so the sounds are [ə and ʌ]. Indonesian people especially different regional language, such Batak Toba language normally locates tongue height hardly in the centre of the mouth to sound vowels. Very clear the all sounds of vowel are pronounced the same as with the letter “a, e, i, o and u”

For instance in words:

- a) Ra [ra] means agreement
Letter and sound *a* is back and low vowel
 - b) Get [get] means getting
Letter and sound *e* is front and mid high vowel
 - c) Sip [sip] means be silent
Letter and sound *i* is front and high vowel
 - d) Do [do] means as finite in Batak language
Letter and sound *o* is back and mid high vowel
 - e) Hus [hus] means go away
Letter and sound *u* is back and high vowel
- Take a look in the the figure below!

Figure 3: Tongue placement and height



3) Lip Rounding

Webster dictionary)

No.	Words	British English	American English
		Transcriptions	Transcriptions
1	Deep	[di:p]	[di:p]
2	Sit	[sit]	[sit]
3	Send	[send]	[send]
4	Get	[get]	[get]
5	Back	[bæk]	[bæk]
6	Car	[kɑ:]	[kɑ ^r]
7	Body	[bɒdi]	[bɑ:di][[bʌdi]
8	Door	[dɔ:]	[dɔ ^r]
9	Love	[lʌv][[lɒv]	[lov]
10	Put	[put]	[put]
11	You	[ju:]	[ju:]
12	The	[ðə]	[ðə]
13	Cup	[kʌp]	[kʌp]

5) Perception of Vowels

Perception of vowels is the philosophical perception toward the vowel sounds, what, what for and how. You can say that for the question of how the sound of for instance: [ɑ:] is pronounced. But for question of what sound [ɑ:] is, this will be the area of perception. The simple term for this perception normally it say naming of sounds. Many books have tried to give names of any sounds with different perspectives. Perception of those vowels sounds are:

- a) Vowel sound [æ] is sound between or beyond [e] and [ɑ]. The way sound a little bit sound [e] and sound [ɑ]. So, the symbol refers to those sounds.
- b) Vowel sound [ɛ] is sound between or beyond [e] and [ə]. The way sound shorter then [e] but a little bit near to [ə] then it is symbolized [ɛ].
- c) Vowel sound [ɒ] is sound between or beyond [ɑ] and [o], but it is a little close to central. The way sound shorter. So sound [o] is divided to be [ɒ].
- d) Vowel sound [ɔ:] is sound between or beyond [ɑ] and [o], it is absolutely back vowels, but mid low and not central. It is longer sounded. So it is labelled [ɔ:].
- e) Vowel sound [ə] is sound between or beyond [i], [e], [u] and [o]. This sound dominates vowel sounds as a nucleus in the end of syllable that more than one syllable. This sound is special, it can be longer if the sound code is [r], and sound [r] will be represented by [ɜ:] and vowel sound [e] will be longer such symbolized [ɛ:].
- f) Vowel sounds [ʌ] is between or beyond sound [ə] and [ɑ]. This sound is short vowels when the original letters is (u) and it is followed by voiceless consonant normally.

The following table is about detail perception related to tongue placement and height, lip rounding and the vowel chart.

Table 2: Perception of Vowel Sound and the Symbol

Numb.	Symbol and Sound	Perception
1	[i:]	Front High Vowel
2	[i]	Front Mid High Central Vowel
3	[e]	Front Mid High Vowel
4	[ɛ]	Front Mid Low Central Vowel
5	[æ]	Front Low Vowel
6	[ɑ:]	Back Low Vowel
7	[ɒ]	Back Mid Low Central Vowel
8	[ɔ:]	Back Mid Low Vowel
9	[o]	Back Mid High Vowel
10	[u]	Back Mid High Central Vowel
11	[u:]	Back High Vowel
12	[ə]	Front Central Vowel
13	[ʌ]	Back Central Vowel

6) Tenseness

Tenseness is about number of tones in producing the sonorous and the tense of vowels. The following is the elaboration for each tense.

a) Short Vowels

Short vowels are vowel sounds around mid and central vowels. The location of Short vowels describes lip rounding, tongue placement and tongue height not so significantly higher and lower, not so in back and front, not so closes and opens. It means that the sounds are shorter.

Table 3: Short Vowel Sound and the Symbol

Numb.	Symbol and Sound	Perception	Examples
1	[i]	Front Mid High Central Vowel	[sit]
2	[e]	Front Mid High Vowel	[send]
3	[ɛ]	Front Mid Low Central Vowel	[gɛt]
4	[æ]	Front Low Vowel	[bæk]
5	[ɒ]	Back Mid Low Central Vowel	[lɒv]
6	[o]	Back Mid High Vowel	in Diphthongs
7	[u]	Back Mid High Central Vowel	[put]
8	[ə]	Front Central Vowel	[ənd]
9	[ʌ]	Back Central Vowel	[kʌp]

b) Long Vowels

You may have noticed that these five long vowels are different from short vowels described in the previous study, not only in length but also in quality. If we compare some similar pairs of long and short vowels, for example [i] with [i:], or [u] and [u:] or [ɒ] and [ɑ:]

we can distinct differences in quality (resulting from differences in tongue shape and position, and lip position) as well as in length.

Table 4: Short Vowel Sound and the Symbol

Numb.	Symbol and Sound	Perception	Examples
1	[i:]	Front High Vowel	[si:]
2	[ɑ:]	Back Low Vowel	[kɑ:]
3	[ɔ:]	Back Mid Low Vowel	[jɔ:]
4	[u:]	Back High Vowel	[ju:]
5	[ə:]	Front Central Vowel	[hə:]

c) Diphthongs

BBC pronunciation has large number of **diphthongs**, sounds which consist of **movement** or **glide** from one short vowel to another. A vowel which remains constant and does not glide is called **pure vowel**, and one of most common pronunciation mistakes that result in a learner of English having a “foreign” accent is the production of pure vowels where a diphthong should be pronounced. In terms of length, diphthongs are like the long vowels described above. Perhaps the most important thing to remember about all the diphthongs is the first part is much stronger and longer than the second part; for example, most of diphthong [ɪi] (as in the words *eye* and *I*) consists of the [ɪ] vowel, and only in about the last quarter of the diphthong does the glide to [i] become noticeable. As the glide to [i] happens, the loudness of the sound decreases. As the result, the [i] parts is shorter and quieter. Foreign learners must, therefore, always remember that the last part of English diphthongs must not be made too strongly. The total number of diphthongs is eight (though [uə] is increasingly rare). The easiest way to remember them is in terms of three groups divided as in the diagram. Some examples are in the following table.

Table 5: Examples of Diphthongs

Numb.	Symbols and Sounds	Examples	Trasncription
1	[eə]	head	[heəd]
2	[iə]	here	[hiə]
3	[uə]	tour	[tuə]
4	[ei]	day	[dei]
5	[ɪi]	fine	[fɪi]
6	[oi]	boy	[boi]
7	[əu]	go	[gəu]
8	[əu]	how	[həu]

d) Triphthongs

The most complex of English sounds of vowel type are **triphthongs**. They can be rather difficult to recognize. A triphthong is a glide from short vowel to another and then to a third, all produced rapidly and without interruption. For example, a careful pronunciation of the word *hour* begins with the vowel quality similar to [a:], goes on to a glide towards the back close or high rounded area (for which we use the symbol [u]), then ends with a mid-central vowel (schwa, [ə]). We use the symbols [ɔuə] to present the way we pronounce *hour*, but this is not always an accurate representation of the pronunciation.

7. The Possible Sounds of Vocal Letter in Vowel Sounds

This point is to show some possible sounds of vocal letter in written form to be sounded. This is taken from the writer's experiences by comparing to dictionaries and following the theory of phonetics and phonology, then the possible sounds are tabled. There will be so many possible sounds in time. The progress of language is still on. Because the experience is forever in exchange. But, however human experience is always limited and the limitation can be represented by language. It is also going on with the writer's experience in concerning the English phonetics and phonology. The following, the table of possible sounds can give help to English students to transcribe and to sound English words when they doubt which is being correct.

Table 6: The Possible Sounds of Vocal Letter in Vowel Sounds

Numb.	Vocal Letter	Possible Vowel Sound	Examples	
			In Words	Transcription
1	A	[ei, e, eə, æ, ɒ]	take, a[men, chair, have, dance	[teɪk, e, tʃeə, hæv, dɒnz]
2	E	[e, ə, i, ɛ, i:]	men, the, the, get, she[me	[mɛn, ðə, ði, get, ʃi:, mi:]
3	I	[i, di]	Sit, I,	[ɪt, di]
4	O	[əu, ə, oi, ɒ, u:, ə:]	go, second, boy, God, good, actor	[gəu, sekənd, boi, gɒd, gu:d, æktə:]
5	U	[u, u:, ə:, ʌ]	put, pure, hurt, cup	[pʊt, pjʊ:, hɜ:t, kʌp]

CONCLUSION

This is to provide an idea on standardizing English vowels in empowering students' pronunciation today. Teaching English is now familiarly as language production internationally. Language production is a process of conveying the meaning or experience in spoken and written language. The process of language production in this study is concerned to the speech

production. A child and the closest family members need time, patient, and optimism. Thus, we need the theory of language production, that is phonetics and phonology. Phonetics is the study of speech sounds. Phonology is the study of the sound system of language. In teaching English today, English is already divided into three circles, (1) Inner circle-mother tongue, (2) outer circle-second user, and (3) expanding circle-foreign user. The three of them must be standardized for teaching by International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and Received Pronunciation (RP). English Vowels are characterized in to 4 characters, by tongue placement, tongue height, lip rounding and tenseness. The production must be correct to produce English vowels to be standard and received. There is also some additional perception of vowels we need to clarify, that is possible vowel sounds of vocal letter. This will give easy teaching English vowels for foreign users of English especially for Indonesian people.

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